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On

MANUSMRITI WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FEMINISM

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INTRODUCTION:

According to the Dictionary of Cambridge the word Feminism is defined as “an organized effort to give women the same economic, social, and political rights as men”[1]. Feminism is a societal and political movement which advocating for gender equality, striving to break down oppressive systems and norms that put women at a disadvantage. It strives to confront and alter societal beliefs, systems, and practices that perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. Moreover, feminism has been a instrument in advocating legal reforms aiming at advancing equality of gender and promoting justice.

If the role of being female alone is insufficient to characterize a woman, and if we dismiss the notion of the "eternal feminine", but acknowledge, even if only temporarily, the presence of women on Earth, the question that arises is: What defines a woman?[2] In essence, those favouring simplicity argue that defining a woman merely as a being with a womb, an ovary, a female, is sufficient. However, the term "female" can sound insulting when spoken by a man, in contrast to the pride he takes in being labelled as a "male".[3] In ancient patriarchal societies, the birth of a girl was often seen as an undesirable occurrence. In all cases, the birth of a son held greater value than that of a daughter.[4]

Understanding the historical role and status of women is crucial for those studying Hindu civilization. This broad topic involves examining the evolving perceptions of women across different periods and their tangible impacts on different aspects of women's lives throughout different stages.[5]

So far as relationship between Western and Indian feminism is concerned lot of argument and disagreement are heard to be raised within the Indian women’s movement. Indian feminists assert a global feminist solidarity, aligning with

groups and individuals worldwide, including those in the West also emphasizing a distinctive sensitivity rooted in the Indian context.

PROBLEMS:

The Manusmriti, despite its historical and cultural significance, has been challenged for upholding gender-based hierarchies and endorsing patriarchal norms. The divergence of feminist perspectives on this text raises critical questions about the intersectionality of culture, feminism, and historical interpretation. Key concerns include recognising how cultural contexts shape feminist readings of ancient texts, examining the impact of the Manusmriti on contemporary gender discussions, and exploring the potential for cross-cultural collaboration within feminist movements. So, the problem is, is there any justice for women possible or not according to Manusmriti?

PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF LITERETURE:

Before deciding on the research topic specified above, I read the following books to acquire comprehensive knowledge about the study:

- **Arvind, Sharma. Women in Indian Religions. New Delhi(India), Oxford University Press, 2002. Edited book.**

This book explore the historical origins of various issues pertaining to women within the diverse religious traditions prevalent in India. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical context surrounding women's roles, experiences, and challenges across different religions in the Indian cultural landscape.

- **Chakravarti, Uma. Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of "Ancient" India. New Delhi(India), Tulika Books, 2006.**

This book helps my comparative study by delving into Historical Sociology of ancient India, specifically addressing gender issues of that time.

- **Veena, R. Howard. The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Philosophy and Gender. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020. Edited Book.**

These volumes explore the history, development, and significance of core subjects in Asian philosophy. Each focus on a single tradition, exploring changes, current debates, and future directions. Covering topics from knowledge, being, gender, language and art, these handbooks offer authoritative insights into Asian thought's importance in Modern era.

- **Altekar, A.S. The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation. The Culture Publication House, India, 1938.**

The book exclusively relies on Hindu scriptures like Manusmriti, Arthasastra, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Smriti literature to depict the status of Hindu women from pre-Vedic times to the British period. It explores the status of women within the orthodox tradition of Hindu society.

- **Roy, Kumkum. The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power: Exploration in Early Indian History. New Delhi(India), Oxford University Press, 2010.**

Kumkum Roy's collection explores the intricacies of gender in early India, challenging simple views. Analyzing texts like Manusmriti and Kamasutra, Roy examines how gender influenced everything from households to urban life. "The Power of Gender and the Gender of Power" uncovers identity strategies and reveals how rituals shaped socialization and challenged norms. A must-read for those wanting a deeper grasp of early Indian history and gender dynamics.

- **N.M., Naseera, and Moly Kuruvilla. “The Sexual Politics of the Manusmriti: A Critical Analysis with Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Perspectives.” Journal of International Women’s Studies, vol. 23, no. 6, 2022.**

This Conference Paper explores how The Manusmriti, an ancient legal text in India, influenced Brahmanic Patriarchy and societal structures. Using qualitative research, it analyzes the text's impact on women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRH Rights).

HYPOTHESIS:

- Critical analysis of women's status in Manusmriti.
- Examine Gender Inequity through the Lens of Feminist Interpretation.
- To explore the role and responsibility attributed to each gender in Manusmriti.
- To investigate the Educational and Participatory limitations imposed on Women by Manusmriti.
- To analyzing the gender dynamics presented in Manusmriti will uncover insights into how ancient societies perceived and structured gender roles, consequently shedding light on the historical underpinnings of gender-related attitudes and behaviours.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this study are-

- Identification of gender discrimination.
- Investigating the status of women as stated in Manusmriti regarding their constituent and legal rights.
- To focus on the responsibilities of woman and man given in Manusmriti evaluating the duties assigned to them.
- Explore the restrictions imposed on woman in the field of education participating in affairs.
- Aims to provide the dynamics of gender of Manusmriti and their implications in ancient society.

The above mention will help to encourage and transform the gender practices and discrimination in contemporary society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The questions that emerge from the above discussion, are as follows-

- How the feminist approach in the text- Manusmriti regarding women's rights and gender dynamics can be delt with?
- How Manusmriti describes the gender role in the ancient Indian Society of men and women in social context?
- How Manusmriti can influence the rights of women in the Indian context?

The research questions aim to explore the feministic perspective of Manusmriti, stating women rights and its i on the historical and contemporary aspects.

SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY:

To fulfill the above mentioned objective both primary and secondary sources are important, as given below-

Primary Source-

Discussing with experts and scholars working in the field on Feminism. Attending seminars and academic discussions that can increase knowledge and offer insightful information. In this study, I will follow the analytical method. These interactions can help the researcher to gather expert opinions, clarify doubts, and refine their understanding.

Secondary Source-

When primary sources are unavailable during research, some secondary sources may be reviewed that provide scholarly insights into ancient Indian society, gender studies, and feminist scholarships. To achieve the aim of my Study, I will follow the relevant books, Journals, Articles, Internet surfing etc.

RESEARCH TOOLS:

Research tools are instruments, software, or methods that researchers use in collecting, analysing, and interpreting data. The choice of research tools depends on the research objectives and the nature of the study, the type of data needed, and the research methodology.

Some common research tools to be use in this research work as-Relevant Books, Computer for Internet surfing.

- Relevant Books:

Books play an important role in research by providing in-depth, reliable, and comprehensive information. It also helps to develop existing knowledge and engage with a variety of perspectives on a given topic.

- Computer:

Computer is fundamental instrument in modern research, impacting all aspects from information retrieval to data analysis, collaboration, and the development of innovative approaches. It helps us to Writing and editing research papers, reports, and articles are made efficient through word processing software like Microsoft Word.

- Internet:

Through Internet researchers can easily access a huge quantity of information through online databases, digital libraries and academic journals. It helps to gather relevant literature, data, and previous research findings.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED WORK:

The purpose of this research work is to critically analyse the status of women in Manusmriti. Reinterpreting Manusmriti from a Feminist Standpoint.
Identifying progressive elements and potentials, rethinking Gender roles and relations and transforming Socio Political and Legal structures.

LIMITATIONS:

- Since most of the ancient books were written in the Devanagari script and subjected to diverse interpretations by various authors. So, accurately interpreting the books can pose challenges for thorough analysis.
- Lack of library facilities at the local level.
- Feminism itself is not a monolithic ideology but comprises diffrent schools of thought. Different feminist perspectives may interpret Manusmriti in distinct ways, leading to a diverse range of conclusions and arguments.

FUTURE WORK:

After this research, society can understand their perspectives on Manusmriti and its relevance to feminist movements.

Explore the potential for reclaiming and reinterpreting selected verses from Manusmriti to foster gender equality and social justice within Hindu religious and cultural contexts.

CHAPTERIZATION:

Introduction
Chapter 1: Concept of Feminism
Chapter 2: Status of women in Manusmriti
Chapter 3: Freedom of women in Indian perspective
Chapter 4: Freedom of women in Western perspective
Chapter 5: Rights of woman from the Legal and Constitutional point of view
Conclusion

- ***INTRODUCTION:***

At the beginning of the study, have to know What does the word “Feminism” define, explain and analyze Feminism. Mary Wollstonecraft’s book “A Vindication of the rights of Women” published in 1792, established Feminism as Intellectual Discussion. However, the word ‘Feminism’ was first used by Charles Fourier in 1837. In the present society discussing on Feminism is important. The late 18th-century women's liberation movement, which extended globally, varied in its impact across different regions. Similar to women in all nations, those in India encounter oppression and exploitation in various settings. Diverse perspectives exist regarding the status of women and the definition of femininity in India. The Manusmriti, an ancient Hindu legal text thought to have originated between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE that offers guidance on social, religious,

and legal matters. However, the way it treats women has been a topic of discussion and dispute.

- ***CHAPTER- 1***

CONCEPT OF FEMINISM:

The first chapter will focus on the conception of Feminism.

Feminism comprises various movements and ideologies with the aim of defining, establishing, social, and economic rights for women. The origin of feminist thought emerged in the late eighteenth century in the United States(US) and Europe. It focused on gaining women's voting rights, equal opportunities, and other legal rights, which continued until early 20th century- it is calculated as the First wave. Second wave focused on the unfair treatment of women regarding the law, society, and culture, are considered to be sparking conversation about the status of women from 1960 to 1990. The third wave continue from the 1990 to the 2000, offers a fresh perspective challenging earlier feminist ideas. The fourth wave of feminism began around 2012, relying on online social media for its advocacy and expression. We also see during the feminist waves, there are different kinds of feminist thoughts like liberal, radical, eco feminism etc.

- ***CHAPTER- 2***

STATUS OF WOMEN IN MANUSMRITI:

The Manusmriti, a book of rules authored by Acharya Manu, holds a significant place in Hindu scriptures after the Vedas. It is believed that the ancient Hindu social system was entirely founded on the principles outlined in this text. To give an outline of the Chapters of the text – (i) Chapter one to six contain topics such as:- the creation, nature, rites, ethics, and religious stages (ashrams) in the earth; (ii) Chapters seven to nine address topics such as:- behaviour, caste, and monarchy; and rest chapters cover caste, rules of character, charity, sacrifice, the law of atonement , rebirth, knowledge and self-emancipation. The text also addresses women's issues within the social and cultural framework. While some

verses support women, others highlight inequality and discrimination against them. This chapter provides an overview of the historical context of the Manusmriti and discusses women's status, power, and authority in relation to the book's teachings.

- ***CHAPTER- 3***

FREEDOM OF WOMEN IN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE:

India has a rich history marked by influential female figures, both mythological and historical, who defied patriarchal norms. Across various regions and communities, resistance to patriarchy took diverse forms. In general, the male-dominated system limited women's rights for an extended period. This chapter examines the Manusmriti from an Indian feminist perspective, exploring its relevance and implications. It aims to showcase both the positive and negative aspects of the text and address criticisms related to its potential to perpetuate gender inequality, and discuss its relevance in today's society, considering its impact on traditional values and gender dynamics.

- **CHAPTER- 4**

FREEDOM OF WOMEN IN WESTERN PERSPECTIVE:

Western feminists participate in analytical discussions, acknowledging the historical context while disapproving of its backward aspects. They frequently question the Manusmriti's contribution to sustaining gender-based hierarchies, highlighting restrictive traditions and limitations imposed on women. Therefore, it is crucial to interpret the text within its context to identify its progressive facets. This chapter also reflects on the relevance and implications of the Manusmriti with Western Feminist perspective, highlighting both its positive and negative aspects. It explores critiques directed in the text, including concerns about its potential to sustain gender inequality. Additionally, it assesses its significance today, considering its impact on established values and gender relationships.

- **CHAPTER- 5**

RIGHTS OF WOMEN FROM THE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL POINT OF VIEW:

The main theme of this chapter is Manusmriti's thought on women's rights within a legal framework. It examines the laws and regulations pertaining to marriage, property rights and the overall legal status of women, scrutinizing the extent to which the text supports or undermines women's rights.

CONCLUSION:

This research allows for an exploration of gender discrimination from both Western and Indian viewpoints within the context of feminism. It presents a critical analysis of the Manusmriti from a feminist perspective, Sometimes revealing the complex and contradictory portrayal of women in this ancient legal text. By examining the Manusmriti's views on rights, limitations, gender roles, and criticisms, we gain insight into the historical dynamics of gender relations in ancient India. It is clear that the government has not effectively upheld the constitutional rights granted to women. For example, when it comes to property, often women do not receive their fair share due to societal beliefs about their emotional nature. The problem is made worse by a society dominated by men, which prevents women from building successful careers and reaching top positions. Starting from a young age, parents' guide their daughters to be submissive to their in-laws and husbands', a custom that requires re-evaluation.

Moreover, the research emphasizes the long-lasting importance of these conversations that are discussed above. It advocates for an ongoing re-evaluation of traditional texts to advance gender equality and justice in contemporary society.

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3. Ibid., P-41
4. Altekar, A.S. The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation. The Culture Publication House, India, 1938. P-3
5. Ibid., PP-2,3

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